

Homerica

By

John Tzetzes

Translation by Ana Untila

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This is the beginning of the Homeric epic poems, as it has briefly been written by John.

When strong-spirited Achilles heard about it
that all this had happened because of Briseis,
he cried for Palamedes, and sent her to the Achaeans.

Consequently, he stopped altogether to fight in this war.
Then Apollo, the great god of the sun, sent them plague. 5
The Argives were dying and Palamedes was not there any more;
He, who had been foreseeing plagues and omens.

When the Trojans heard about the plague and Achilles' rage,
they didn't stay inside their towers nor the city,
but readily threw away the bolts from the gates 10
and came until the ships to slay all the Argives.
The latter doomed by the plague and by the Trojans' hands,
left alone their sleep and counterattacked with speed
and passionately fought back the Trojans.

They agreed to have two warriors fight before all 15
and whoever won, would take Helen and her companions.
From the Trojan side came Paris and from the Argives Menelaus.
Paris was defeated, but the Trojans didn't keep their word.
Pandarus immediately shot Menelaus down.
He didn't take the glory; fame turned her back to him. 20
Machaon made him well laying healing drugs upon him,
causing disaster for Trojans, Troy and Pandarus.
While they were throwing arrows, a bad omen came to them,
a bright shining star, sign of the war,
from Athens, according to Homer, sent by Zeus himself. 25

When the Gods saw what happened between them [i.e. the fighters] that day,
horrible Cronus and strong-hearted Ares
deprived them of vigorous glory in war.
The Achaeans killed the Trojans and sacked their city.
That day would be decided who would be the best. 30
Time usually judges who that would be,
those who travel away from home to succeed, or those who get honoured at home.
And Cronus, the son of Helios, would make
those, who protected Troy, prepare to mourn.

The Achaeans and the Trojans confronted each other, forthwith, 35
to fight; a lot of heads fell then.
Antilochus killed then Echepolus, Thalysius' son
and the Trojan man Agenor killed Elephenor.
Ajax slayed the son of Anthemion near Simoeis.
Leucus seized Antiphus, the bastard son of Priam. 40
Odysseus slayed Democoon, the son of Dardanus.
Pirous took the life of the Danaan Dioreus,
but was killed with a spear in his heart by Thoas from Aetolia.

Diomedes attacked in the middle of the fighters
shinning in his armour just like the skilful fire, 45
just as gleaming as the Syracusan's mirror
with which Archimedes attracted the light of the sun

and set fire to the new Aeneid of Marcus Marcellus.
 That much was shining the armour of Diomedes;
 he was shining and sparkling like the brightness of flame. 50
 Just like the Sirius star, the dog of Orion,
 with that shining armour he entered the battle with joy.

First to be killed by him was Fegeus, the son of Dares,
 who was working with fire and doing cunningly crafts. 55
 Homer calls them priests of Hephaestus.
 He truly slayed them; the same did the other Achaeans.
 The son of Atreus killed Odius and Idomeneus killed Phaestus.
 Scamandrius was slayed by the long-haired Menelaus.
 Meriones killed Phereclus and the son of Phyleus killed Pedaeus. 60
 Eurypylos killed Hypsenor, the son of Dolopion,
 who was the priest of Scamander, the wide river
 where silver fish were moving in rotation.
 Pandarus wounded Diomedes' shoulder with an arrow.

The son of Tydeus, then, brought destruction to the Trojans.
 He then killed Astynous and Hypenor, the leader of the soldiers, 65
 and the sons of Eurydamas, Abas and Polyidus.
 He, also killed the sons of Phaenops, Xanthus and Thoon
 as well as Echemon and Chromius, two sons of Priam
 along with Pandarus, the deceiver, who didn't keep his oath.
 He, even hit the son of the shepherd Anchises, 70
 Aeneas; he hit him with an unhewn stone.
 The desire of leaving kept Aeneas safe as he escaped
 to a holy ship, dedicated to the god of the sun, seen by all.
 The son of Tydeus followed him there crying loud,
 just like the madman for women who can't wait meeting them. 75
 It's been said he was wounded by the hand of Aphrodite,
 and that she chased him and stopped his rush for battle.

Then Sarpedon awoke the Trojans to fight.
 First of all Agamemnon killed Deicoon,
 then Aeneas killed Crethon and Orsilochus; 80
 he had his wounds cured, those made by Diomedes;
 he would have killed Menelaus, when came face to face,
 if the brave son of Nestor was not there at that moment.
 Aeneas escaped, although brave warriors chased him.
 The son of Atreus, first, killed the king Pylaemenes. 85
 Antilochus killed Mydon, who had the bad luck to be there.
 Then Hector along with his brave war-lover heart
 slew Menestheus first and afterwards Anchialus.
 Ajax killed Amphius, the son of Selagus;
 he was fighting alone against Trojans and Hector. 90
 Sarpedon killed Tlepolemus among the Achaeans,
 he was brave with long hair, the beloved son of Herakles.
 Sarpedon almost lost his breath by the latter

when he was hit by a long spear,
but it was not meant to be; he escaped that fatal day. 95

Odysseus condemned the Lycians to a bad destiny.
He killed Koiranos, Alastor and Chromius,
also Alcandrus, Halius, Noemon and Prytanis.
Hector, on the other hand, killed Trechus, Oenomaus and Orestes
and Teuthras and Helenus and Oresvius. 100
But when Periphas died due to Ares' anger
the son of Tydeus, brought the horses and came close to him
and eagerly went to the warlike side of the flank.
The Trojans when saw the long lasting stroke,
they roared with fear, the mountain of Ida rattled, 105
such a man's destiny was not to die like this.

Then Athena and Hera stopped the son of Tydeus
and war-lover Hector from fighting each other.
The Trojans and the Achaeans were fighting away from the gods.
They had nothing against Hector nor against Diomedes, 110
that's why the fight was honest; Achaeans were killing Trojans.
Ajax, the son of Telamon, killed Akamas, the son of Eussorus.
The son of Tydeus killed, also, Axylus and Kalesius.
Euryalus killed Dresus and Ofeltes
and the two sons of Bucolion, Aesepus and Pedasus. 115
Odysseus killed Pidytes and Polypoetes killed Astyalus.
Antilochus slew Aulerus and Teucer slew Aretaon.
Leitus murdered the Boeotian hero Phylakos.
Eurypylus killed Melanthius and Agamemnon killed Elatus
and Adrastus, whom Menelaus had brought to him alive. 120

Hector, then, entered the city of Troy following Helenus' warning
and ordered the sacrifice of twelve calves to Athena.
The son of Tydeus made peace with Glaucus, the son of Hippolochus,
exchanging his bronze arms with Glaucus' golden ones.
Zeus had flattered the bestowing Glaucus' mind, 125
that they would keep their friendship's fame imperishable.
Hector had ordered the Trojans to make sacrifices to Athena,
and went to encourage Alexander to fight.
He went to see Andromache and his son Astyanax
and persuaded them to have good thoughts in heir minds. 130
With Alexander he returned to the battle leaving the city behind.

Alexander killed then Menesthes with his spear.
Hector slew Eioneus and Glaucus slew Iphinous.
Ajax then provoked Hector into a contest battle;
Whoever won would receive gifts of honour; 135
a big bull was behind them, given by the son of Atreus.

Oh, you poor men! you foolish, angry in temper,
you haven't respected any of the ideas of Empedocles,

you miserable, lame, blind in your eyes,
 you worship men, as if they were demigods, offering them wealthy gifts, 140
 lambs of bulls, of sheep or birds;
 the same way, involuntarily, the baleful man had welcomed me
 before hiring me, confounded Isaac
 along with his crooked-minded wife
 fearing for my healing, high-minded beautiful language; 145
 they were foolishly honouring all those who were bodily deformed,
 lepers, bold-headed, ignorant, those who brought sorrow to their homes,
 who were obeying Isaac's wife in hidden marriage-beds.
 I will not give up like others to sing about the unusual;
 although they were good enough, they were lacking prudence. 150
 But now, Justice will, finally, help them;
 all these paramours and adulterers will be destroyed,
 all these husbands with golden horns who do not see what's better
 and have deceitfully obeyed their viper wives
 who had been proud for their concealed friends. 155
 They are lepers, ignorant and bring sorrow to their homes;
 While men, who are half gods, are decent to every aspect,
 to their family, their appearance, their words and actions.
 Because are bad those who honour the foolish.
 The son of Atreus, who wasn't sick as the others, 160
 honoured Ajax, sending him a bull,
 in order to win Hector, the bad-tempered enemy, in battle.

Antenor suggested to give Helen back to the Achaeans
 so they wouldn't be fighting without purpose, but keeping their oath.
 Alexander, instead of Helen, suggested to give them gifts. 165
 The Trojans sent Idaeus to the Argives
 to tell them let them bury their dead.
 They agreed. Both of them buried their dead with due honour.

The Achaeans built towers to defend their ships,
 according to Nestor's suggestion; he had decided this thing. 170
 Then, Zeus moved around the clouds in the sky
 and angrily thundered revealing bad things for the Achaeans.
 Exulting himself, he said he was the most powerful among the gods;
 because of him the sky has always been moving.

The Achaeans were running away from the Trojans; they were being defeated. 175
 King Diomedes saved Nestor from Hector's hands.
 He killed Hector's fast charioteer, Eniopeus.
 He also killed Agelaus pushing him into a ditch,
 like when an eagle sees a fawn, it throws it to the earth.
 Many other Achaean kings had killed that day. 180
 Teucer killed ten men hitting them with arrows.
 Lastly, he threw stones to Hector, and loaded again.
 The Trojans drove the Argives to the Achaeans' ditch.
 But when the slaughter of men was stopped by the night,

fire shut them in and burnt lots of Achaeans. 185
There were a thousand fires with fifty men in each.

The Trojans were lurking; the Achaeans were overcome
so they sent an ambassador to the son of Peleus; this is how he replied.
The son of Tydeus and Odysseus had been spying the Trojans.
They had killed Dolon, twelve Thracians and Rhesus; 190
while they were returning, they took Rhesus' horses.

When the pure light of Erigeneia [Eos] was coming out,
the son of Atreus had killed many leaders of the Trojans.
Koon was to stop him by piercing his hand with a sword.
Socus almost killed Odysseus if Ajax had not saved him. 195
Then Alexander drew his bows by the horns
and hit the son of Tydeus and Machaon and Eurypylus.
Nestor carried Machaon the healer away
and Achilles asked Patroclus who that was.
He asked for Nestor to come back to his hut, 200
so he could heal Eurypylus' terrible wound.

The Trojans seized the wall of the Danaans and made them fear.
Earth-shaker Poseidon saved the Argives.
Many heads from both sides fell down to earth.
The son of Atreus and Nestor along with the wounded men 205
came back to war; a great roar was heard.

Hera sent a delicate air swiftly up in the sky,
like Aphrodite's charmed girdle;
she drove the motion of the rain-bringing clouds
and revealed the fodder abounding in herbs and flowers 210
which she didn't want to hold but to return it back.
It's been said that secretly into Hera's bed
Zeus was sleeping. The Achaeans were now winning the Trojans.
Ajax stopped Hector from battle hitting him with a rock.
Swift-footed Locrus killed countless people. 215

When Zeus woke up, he prepared bad things for the Achaeans.
He roused Hector's beaten spirit, who was bleeding.
Hector killed many and set fire to Protesilaus' ships.

Then Achilles sent Patroclus to defend the Achaeans.
He killed many, among whom Sarpedon, Zeus' son. 220
He, finally, was killed by the murderer Hector.

Afterwards, gold-haired Menelaus killed
Euphorbus, the beloved son of Bucolus and Abarbarea.
It was occurring a violent fight around Patroclus.
Antilochus was sent to call Achilles. 225
After hearing his melodious voice,
he came to war and collected his dead friend.

That's how the descendant of Aecus ended his anger,
who was mad at the Argives because of Palamedes.
Homer said it was not because of that, 230
because he did not want to say bad things about the Danaans.
He didn't want to say songs about the grace of this man.
This anger lasted until Patroclus fell dead.

Then the son of Peleus put an end to his anger and wrath
and made peace with the son of Atreus; he got equipped with golden arms. 235
He returned to the battle and killed many of the Trojans.
Aeneas and Hector were dominated by impotent panic.
He killed all the others next to the river Xanthus;
he killed twelve living persons as a revenge for Patroclus.

He was slaying them next to the river Xanthus. 240

Some of them were running inside the walls of the city.
Hector's destiny found him outside the gates.
Achilles killed him and pulled him from the chariot, where he had tied him.
There are different opinions about how Hector died.

Some of them say he died in front of the city's gates, 245
where he attacked the son of Peleus in battle.

He was seriously wounded by a hit on his throat.
Some others say his strong spirit didn't let him down,
that Achilles killed Hector in a hand to hand fight.

Moreover, the great-hearted amazon Penthesilea, 250
they say, had come to help the Trojans.

In the darkness of the night Hector went out to meet her
along with few men they passed through the river Scamander.
There the son of Peleus killed him, after watching him from a thicket.

At dawn, he was pulling his legs from the chariot in front of the city, 255
in front of his beloved relatives and his noble parents
and the Trojan men and women and the illustrious allies.

All of them were loudly lamenting watching him from the towers.
It was so clamorous their cry,

that even the birds up in the air were trembling 260
and were fearing the terribly dreadful loud-shouting;

that's why they horribly shouted in the air with their mouth open.
They were clapping their wings so quickly that they made a terrible thud.

The Achaeans from the other side were cheerfully shouting. 265
The Trojans closed, then, windy Ilion's gates.

Shall we describe now how glorious Hector looked like.

He was tall, dark-skinned, noble; he had a strong voice but was faltering in speech.

He had beautiful nose and beard, darkish and curly hair.

Such was that who fell, whom all the Trojans were grieving.

The son of Peleus buried his friend Patroclus with due honours. 270

He organised contests with prizes for the athletes.

He was glad about the fate of Hector, Priam's son.

He had him outside his hut for twelve dawns
being dead and dishonoured; as if it was Zeus' will.

But when on the thirteenth day, dawn was about to come, 275
life-bearing Hera caused rain from the big sky,
for the untiring, ever-painful, noble descendant.

She raised him up above the earth and carried him away above the ocean.
The goddess Nyx [i.e. Night] stepped in to Cronus' house
where she encountered the cloudy gloomy Titans; 280
But Eos went up from Cronus' to the floor of Zeus' abode.

They were hostile to each other, Eos and Nyx;
they never looked at each other; they were always turning away their eyes.

They never remained together in the same place.
Nyx had given birth to Erigeneia with yellow veil. 285

Eos, the light-minded, has always been excited with a beautiful face.
She's been relentlessly not returning for rearing, as she should.

They held wild hostilities to each other.

That's why Nyx was going down to the cloudy Cronus' palace
while her daughter Erigeneia was going up to Zeus', 290
along with her strong noble brother Helios,
who came to shine above all the happy and blessed ones.

He feasted on the king Poseidon's palace,
where all the gods were glad and warmed by seeing him.

Then Priam, the most miserable among the mortals, 295
stood up from the dust, where he had fallen to sleep,
and shed tears for the beautiful son of Hector, Astyanax.

He came to beg the murderer of his son.

He was challenging the strength of his heart.

He bowed his head in front of his son's murderer, 300
as he was overpowered under the hands of Aecus' descendant.

His sons and the Trojans were kept away inside the towers.

When they saw an eagle holding on its right hand a bird,
they came along in suffering and yoked the mules to a chariot.

They brought it, upon which they had put the ransom for Hector's head, 305
countless jewellery and ten golden talents.

They threw away the bolts from the gates of Troy.

They entered quickly, crying before Priam.

Lamenting loudly they prepared the tomb.

The strength of Priam drove everybody inside the towers, 310
he only kept Idaeus as a driver of the mules.

Priam was like an earth-shaker and heavy in the head,
he had covered his head with dust because of grief.

He walked all the way pitiable and moaning.

His daughter, Polyxena, with beautiful face 315
pointed his way with her right hand.

Andromache was following her shedding tears,
holding her crying babies, Hector's sons,
two brothers, Astyanax and Laomedas.

They went and got mixed among the Achaeans' huts. 320
They were begging the Argives, falling on their knees upon dust,
to persuade Achilles to accept the ransom.

The old Achaean kings kept them away from other Achaeans'
eyes, until they brought Priam and his companions in front of the son of Peleus.
He felt pity when he saw them, although his heart was of brass. 325
They were pitiably wallowed and had their feet smeared with oil.
First of all, wallowed Priam spoke.

You, strong son of Peleus! You have such a great heart.
Fear the gods in the sky, who can see everything.
Spare my old age, respect my grey hair. 330

Show pity on me, the old man, that I am the most miserable among mortals.
You have killed fifty strong-hearted sons of mine,
but none of them was so beloved like my Hector, the divine.
I'm begging you, take the ransom and give me the dead Hector in return;
don't throw him in the dew to become prey for the dogs. 335
Give him to the Trojan men and women so we can properly mourn him.

That is how Priam, Dardanus' ancestor, bravely spoke.
Afterwards, the wife of the glorious Hector, tamer of horses,
who was moaning a lot and tears were flowing endlessly,
she slightly bowed her head and her beautiful face 340
and spoke delicate words to her husband's murderer
and begging the wild man she said.

You, great-hearted descendant of Aecus, who is being watched by the gods,
show pity on me, my king, and on my two orphan sons.
He, who was the glory of Troy, you killed him with your spear. 345
Have pity upon all the miserable women.

The heavenly gods' decision has brought them such a great pain.
They've become unwillingly so baneful and mournful.
But why am I telling you all this grieving in despair?
Please, show mercy on me, although you are an enemy. 350
Please, give me Hector, please give him, so I can prepare him a tomb.

Seven of my brothers and my good father
were killed by you; you didn't even strip them off their arms but buried them with them.
If you take the ransom, your goodness will be known.
You were and are a hero; show it to me concerning Hector. 355
Give him as gifts of honour to his children,
so they could bury him with due honours and make him a great headstone.
Your goodness will be their last glorious armour.

That's what she said, while praying, the good daughter of Eetion.
The two sons of Hector had tears on their shining faces. 360
They were looking at their crying and begging mother.

They remembered their father, whose name they heard was Hector.
They were shedding prudent tears from their infantile eyes.
They seduced Achilles' mind and his implacable heart.
He felt pity seeing them and his heart got weakened. 365

These noble people's tears broke this savage man.
His reddish skin turned into colourless and pale.
He was hiding his tears forcing them to remain in his eyes.

Suddenly, the thick clouds were mixed up by the air
and Hector was covered and hidden by the dust; the dawn showed up. 370
He was barely seen under the thundering clouds.

A persistent storm had started upon the brazen earth.
A strong wind drove away the wild storm.
Until then, Achilles' heart was pale as well.
His gloomy eyes were delicate now. 375

He was touched by the grief of Hector's sons.
The tears from his eyes were pouring forth.
This man's feelings and quick thoughts were dispersed.
He kept his tears concealed into his eyes.

Virgin Polyxena, who was wearing a soft tunic, spoke like this, 380
begging for her well-raised brother.

Oh, Achilles, have pity on us and weaken your wild heart.
Respect this old man, my father, who's in deep grief,
who's begging you on his knees, although he is a king,
and is trembling asking for his son. Take pity on him. 385
Take the ransom and let his son, Hector.

Along with the ransom for Hector, take me as your slave
in your hut along with your other women slaves.

She spoke like that with her soft heart grieving.
Achilles felt pity on them and took the old man's hand 390
and invited him to sit and permitted him to cry.
He consoled him and offered him something to eat.
Priam obeyed and had dinner with him, although it was not his intention.

When they were eating around the table for the guests,
Achilles went out the hut and from the Priam's chariot 395
he took the silver and the gold that were for Hector's ransom.

He was given another gift, to take Polyxena to his house
and have a memorial wedding of her and of great-hearted Achilles.
His heart, though, was not hoping to have her before wedding.
She was a sign that due to this woman's heart he'd be destroyed. 400

After Achilles got everything, he put Hector in the chariot
and asked Dardanus' ancestor. How many days should I hold back from battle?
So you can grieve for Hector and fearlessly shed your tears.
He listened to their reply and gave his word for this.
Divine Achilles returned back to his hut 405
while the others were heading to Troy lamenting vehemently.

When glorious Hector was visible from the towers of Troy,
being dead upon the chariot passing through the river Xanthus,
the first one among the Trojan women to see him was Cassandra, Phoebus' priestess.

She threw away the jewellery from her head and loosed her hair. 410
 She was running up and down, in all directions, upon the towers;
 she was pulling her thick hair and spoke like this.
 You, deep-bosomed women of Troy and you, countless Trojan tribes,
 you, of a wide-spread language and of glorious spears allies,
 come hither and see me from the gates and the towers, 415
 take to heart this insufferable grief.
 Hector is being dragged to the bright-towered Troy
 and to the noble Trojans' wives and baby children.
 He has been the glory of the Trojans and of the illustrious allies,
 he has stained the Trojan earth with red from the Argives' blood. 420
 His fame will not be forgotten not even from the last men on earth.
 Here he comes to Troy, dead upon a chariot. Woe's me!

The prophet kept crying and lamenting out loud.
 Many people were climbing to the citadel upon the towers,
 old men, patient of toil, along with old women 425
 and daughters and virgins and women who had given birth.
 So many people had gathered that the towers were crowded.
 Mothers were coming along with their children, humiliated.
 The sound of the stepping foot were making their knees tremble.
 Even the babies, who were breastfeeding, were melting into tears. 430
 While these people were climbing the towers lamenting,
 the others were pouring themselves out of the wall.
 Then the Trojan women and from the other tribes, around the queen
 Hecuba were gathered and were moaning all together.
 There were Agamede, the daughter of Anchises and sister of Aeneas, 435
 as well as Phrontide, Abarbarea, and Theano, Clytius' wife,
 and Laothoe, Oenoe and other Trojan women.
 They were married women on the side of Priam, excellent in everything;
 along with them there was long-robed Helen shedding tears
 with her four sons she had with Alexander; 440
 Bunicus, Korythus, Aganus and Idaeus.
 Cassandra and Laodicea were around Hecuba;
 they lifted her up in front of the people
 and she bowed her head in front of the dead body.
 Afterwards, Hecuba's eleven sons came in front of her; 445
 Aesacus and Helenus, Pamon, Paris and Antiphonus,
 Hippothous, Agathon, Polites and Deiphobus,
 along with them noble Troilus went there.
 They had escaped from the rage of Aecus' descendant until then.
 Even the baby Polydorus came, who was earlier in Thrace. 450

All of them went near to the chariot that brought Hector.
 They had their heads uncovered and all of them were mourning;
 they were bewailing and lamenting, women as well as men.
 Even the Trojan kings were moaning and bewailing;
 they came down from the towers, where Hector's corpse was lying. 455
 A strong loud cry by older people was heard from the towers

along with the cry heard from baby children
 and the women were lamenting, as well, all together.
 Even the tribes of their allies were grieving.
 The horses were neighing and shedding tears. 460
 The tame animals, that are helping the mortals,
 were twirling and were distraught with grief from the lament of the men;
 they were making a booming sound, as if they were lamenting.
 Even Scamander was crying; the Nymphs were watering the mountain Ida.
 Hellespont roared; a humming roused up everywhere. 465
 Even Phoebus Apollo from the clouds was sunk into grief;
 Zeus shed silently tears; the whole earth lamented.
 Everybody who heard this terrible sound was afraid;
 It was so loud, according to Meton's songs,
 that it was believed that the world had come to its last ending days. 470
 Whenever seven gods would come to Cronus dark
 house, Aquarius, Cronus would terrify them.
 He would shake everything, even the ethereal kingdom of Zeus;
 he would hide everything into the mist and the deep abyss;
 It was so loud the Trojans' lamenting 475
 as the gods' wail that day.

The night caught the Trojans crying.
 Those who were outside the gates were coming for sleep;
 they were pulling their hair around Hector, whom they really loved.
 Priam brought him into the city of Troy. 480
 After shedding tears for the city around the towers,
 they properly prepared Hector and put him into bed;
 for nine days they were mourning and then they set him on fire.

They had performed everything when dawn came on the tenth day.
 Many of them unyieldingly watched him out 485
 and put his strong body into fire outside the walls of the city
 and, afterwards, they placed mighty divine Hector into a grave.
 A lot of soil they poured upon him from above
 and placed upon the grave beautiful marble in his honour.

The end of Homeric

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